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RELIGION AND BENEFICENCE;

OR,

THE SYSTEM OF GIVING

TAUGHT IN

THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

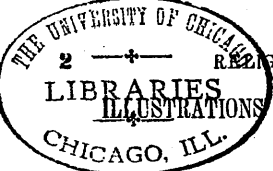
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

1800-1864  
BY REV. PARSONS COOKE,

LYNN, MASSACHUSETTS.

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A SHOEMAKER being asked how he contrived to give so much, replied, that it was easily done by obeying St. Paul's precept in 1 Cor 16: 2: "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him." "I earn," said he, "one day with another, about a dollar a day, and I can without inconvenience to myself or family lay by five cents of this sum for charitable purposes; the amount is thirty cents a week. My wife takes in sewing and washing, and earns something like two dollars a week, and she lays by ten cents of that. My children each of them earn a shilling or two, and are glad to contribute their penny; so that altogether we lay by us in store forty cents a week. And if we have been unusually prospered, we contribute something more. The weekly amount is deposited every Sunday morning in a box kept for that purpose, and reserved for future use. Thus, by these small earnings, we have learned, that it is more blessed to give than to receive. The yearly amount saved in this way is about *twenty-five dollars*; and I distribute this among the various benevolent societies; according to the best of my judgment."

A CLERGYMAN every Sabbath evening sets apart a portion for his charity-fund. If at any time he has not the money, he credits the sum on a benevolent account. As calls are presented, he draws from this fund; and if an urgent call at any time requires more than he has thus set apart, he charges the balance on his benevolent account, to be replaced from future incomes. Thus his contributions are identified with his own enjoyment of religion and growth in grace; he gives "not grudgingly," but of "a willing mind;" applications for charity are met with pleasure; and he feels that in all he receives and expends, he is acting as a steward of God. He has also secured the adoption of the system by his congregation with very encouraging success.

\* The biography of eminently pious and useful men since the Reformation shows that great numbers of them have recognized the obligation stately to devote a portion of their income to charitable uses. Lord Chief-justice Hale, Rev. Dr. Hammond, Baxter, Doddridge, and others regularly gave a tenth; Dr. Watts a fifth; Mrs. Rowe one half. Rev. John Wesley, when his income was thirty pounds, lived on twenty-eight and gave two; and when his income rose to sixty pounds, and afterwards to one hundred and twenty, he still lived on twenty-eight, and gave all the remainder. Mr. Nathaniel R. Cobb, a merchant connected with the Baptist church in Boston, in 1821, at the age of twenty-three, drew up and subscribed the following covenant, to which he faithfully adhered till on his deathbed he praised God that by acting according to it he had given in charity more than \$40,000.

"By the grace of God, I will never be worth more than \$50,000.

"By the grace of God, I will give one-fourth of the net profits of my business to charitable and religious uses.

"If I am ever worth \$20,000, I will give one-half of my net profits; and if I am ever worth \$30,000, I will give three-fourths; and the whole, after \$50,000. So help me God, or give to a more faithful steward, and set me aside.

"N. R. COBB."

*Wm. B. Peir*

# RELIGION AND BENEFICENCE

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LYNN, MASS.

CHRISTIANITY is something more than a doctrine, or ritual, or code of morals; it is a life consisting in love to God and man. Love is the central and all-pervading element of Christian character. And nothing in the gospel aims more directly to nurture this life or love, than those provisions which make the pardoned sinner a giver of gifts to God. Here we solve the wonder that the Owner of the universe will have gifts made to himself, as though the silver and the gold, and the cattle upon a thousand hills, were not his. He has a great work to do in one dead in sin and selfishness—a work not usually accomplished without long-continued discipline to benevolent acts. To bring the redeemed soul under the needful training to benevolence, the Redeemer takes the place of the poor, and makes the wants of a suffering world his own, and causes his own voice to be heard in all the pleadings of human distress, and lays on every pardoned sinner the constraints of his dying love, to impel him to acts of love. For this end, the independent Source of all good receives gifts, as a parent receives gifts from his child to draw out generous dispositions.

The feeling of a regenerate heart in giving gifts to the poor for Christ's sake, involves that obedience, homage, and gratitude to God, and kindness to man, which form the prime ingredient of true religion, and which all the ends of religion require us to cultivate. Thus the wants of this shattered world serve as our means of grace and of progress in love to God and man; and the central purpose, to



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which all requirements of alms converge, is MAN'S SANCTIFICATION FOR GOD'S GLORY.

This will more clearly appear if we trace out and lay together the different branches of scriptural instruction, touching the duty of alms.

1. The first of these is, *that the giving of property to God is everywhere made an indispensable ingredient of true religion.* Fair as is the semblance of piety which some maintain without acts of charity, it is deceptive. A religion divorced from that which is the prime element of godliness, is making its way to a terrible disappointment. From Genesis to Revelation, we find not a hint that such a religion is acceptable to God or profitable to man.

In the first account of religious worship by any of the human race, we read that the fruit of the ground and the firstlings and fat of the flocks were offered to God in acts of worship. Nor did the typical intent of Abel's offerings, nor of those of the Hebrews afterwards, as foreshadowing the death of Christ, exclude the intent to exercise the heart to self-denial and sacrifice in the cost of the offerings. The whole sacrificial institutions carried as effective a warfare against human selfishness, as if intended for that alone. Hence David would not "offer to God that which cost him nothing." The cost of the thing offered was indispensable, because one purpose of the act was, to subdue the selfishness of the heart, while doing homage to the God of love. So the religion of pardoned sinners had its first exercise in a devotement of property to God. And this offering of property was a spiritual act—an act of faith: "By faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice."

And when, after the flood, the new head of the race came forth from the ark, he commenced just such worship, in the use of property devoted to God. He had but seven cattle and seven sheep with which to begin the world, and yet he hesitates not to sacrifice one of each, as soon as he sets foot upon the ground. For after all his intimate

communings with God, he had discovered no way of true religion which involved no cost, no sacrifice of selfishness.

The first thing done by Abraham after he got to Canaan, and indeed by the other patriarchs whenever they moved and made a settlement in a new place, was to erect an altar and commence the worship of God by costly sacrifices. Abraham sustained that intimate communion with God which entitled him to be called "the friend of God," by a form of worship that made constant drafts upon his property. His special ratifications of God's covenant were made by sacrifices. His grateful homage to God in view of victories over his enemies, had expression in his rendering a tenth of the spoils to a priest of God. His training to acts of self-sacrifice must have been the school in which he reached that sublime act of sacrificing his only son. By lesser sacrifices, he gained the strength of principle which could endure such a trial and compass such a reward in not only a son recovered as from the dead, but another Son who should be at once the Heir and Saviour of the world; yea, and other sons, as the stars of the sky for multitude.

When Jacob, newly awoke from the raptures of his visions of God, was moved to avouch Jehovah as his God and King, he took the accustomed form of owning allegiance while he said, "Then shall the Lord be my God and of all that thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto thee." Whenever this custom of tithing began, it seems now to have become a standing law of Jehovah's worshippers. Jacob adopts it, as a fit form of expressing at once his allegiance and his worship.

Notice next this same element of religion among the Israelites in the wilderness, while employed in building the tabernacle. This was done by the free-will offerings of the people, not because God had need of them, but because the people had special need to have their hearts opened to benevolence, after all the soul-withering influ

ences experienced in Egypt. The same miraculous power that supplied food and drink on desert sands for a whole nation, could have brought from the sands and rocks the gold and pearls for the tabernacle; but while the body was fed by miracles, the life of the soul must be promoted according to its own laws. And as God gave special skill to the artificers of the tabernacle, so he gave special grace to the donors, in order to break the crust of selfishness contracted during the declensions in Egypt. Hence that outburst of generosity in collections for the building, which even had need to be checked. These offerings were eminently acts of worship. They were made for the house of God, were called offerings unto the Lord, and were made in homage and gratitude to God.

Not only the building, but all the ritual of the tabernacle, made acts of devoting property to God a substantial part of religion. Over and above the typical import of these countless offerings, observe how they drew upon the wealth of the people, and inserted the cost of money into almost every act of worship, and secured a constant exercise of self-sacrificing dispositions; and you cannot avoid the conviction, that a discipline of the benevolent affections was a leading purpose of the Mosaic institutions. Here all must see, that the exercise of religion and the worship of God were inseparably blended with gifts of property.

The revival, after sad declensions, which took place in the reign of David, carried with it a remarkable revival of this part of religion. It moved the whole nation to contribute the immense treasures needed to build the temple. No features of that revival have such prominence in its history as the alacrity with which king and people poured in the treasures for that building; and God was most devoutly acknowledged and worshipped in those generous acts. With one heart and voice they uttered this sentiment, which is the true source of religious gifts: "All

things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee."

In all Hebrew history, we see that the offerings of property to God were full or stinted in proportion as religion prospered or decayed; and they are currently alluded to as the visible exponents of thriving or decaying religion. David prays for a revival: "Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion. Then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar." And God pledged a revival in connection with the production of offerings that had been withheld: "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, and prove me now herewith, if I will not open the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing." And when the people grudged the expense, and offered the lame and the blind, he spurned a worship that withheld the required cost; and he said, I have no pleasure in you, nor will I accept your offering.

Yea, so fixed was the principle which identified religion with gifts, that the Old Testament requires men to show fruits meet for repentance by them. "Break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor." In the delineations of the character of a truly religious man given in the Old Testament, it is said, "He showeth mercy, and lendeth. He hath dispersed abroad, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever." "He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed." The acts of worship connected with fasting are made acceptable by acts of beneficence. The fast which God has chosen, "Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house?" Thus, in every way, the Old Testament makes religion and beneficence to be so much one thing, that they cannot be separated.

The New Testament does the same more effectually. While it substitutes the offering of Christ once for all in the place of the costly sacrifices, it substitutes broader and more pressing occasions to draw out the generosity of Chris-

tains, and discipline them to acts of love. Where the Old Testament required expense to foreshadow a coming Christ, the New requires a greater expense to proclaim his actual coming and redemption to all nations. The first recorded act of worship to the infant Saviour was rendered in "gold, frankincense, and myrrh." The first public discourse of Christ emphasized the duty of alms, and coupled it with prayer as an inseparable adjunct; and in the beatitudes, it places the merciful in the same class with the meek, the poor in spirit, and the pure in heart. And it is impossible for language to convey the sentiment that there can be no true religion without gifts to God and his poor, with more force and majesty than it is uttered in one of Christ's last discourses: "Then shall the king say unto them on the left hand, Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was a hungered, and ye gave me no meat." Let those whose religion is so spiritual and unearthly as not to touch their money, ponder this, and expect to hear it again at the last day.

Because Christ's religion took such a hold of one's property, his dealings with inquirers and opponents had so much to do with it. His way of presenting his claims led directly into the money interests of the heart. It made Zaccheus say, "The half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." To the blind Pharisees, famed for covetousness and given to superstitious and hypocritical washings, he said, "Give alms of such things as ye have, and all things shall be clean unto you." That is, bring your hearts into communion with God through benefactions to his poor, and you will have opened the purifying fountains upon yourselves. When dealing with the young man who had great possessions, he showed him what he lacked, by putting the demands of the poor upon his wealth into the foreground of religion. And it was in

this connection that he said, "It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye," than for one who "trusts in riches"—that is, one who regards wealth more than God and his claims on that wealth, and who therefore lacks beneficence—"to enter the kingdom of God." This sentence is the doom of those, whether rich or poor, whose property stands without the circle of their religion.

He enforced the same identity of religion and beneficence, by putting the multiplied riches of earth and the treasures of heaven at the disposal of those who surrendered houses and lands for his sake. Indeed, through all his ministry are interspersed incidents and remarks to the same point. We have an instance, in his placing the highest value on the widow's gift, because it had more of religious affection in it—showing, that the essence and value of a gift consisted in the religious act involved. Also in his commendation of the expense upon his person of a costly perfume. This was worth more than three hundred pence given to the poor, because it was an exponent of a more intense religious affection and homage. A volume of pertinent meaning is expressed in this: "Sell that ye have and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also:" that is, be careful about your use of your treasure, for where it goes it carries the heart with it, whether to earth or heaven. The same is involved in the parable of the unjust steward, the sentiment of which is, that by acting as God's stewards while we may, and giving to the poor as we can, we in effect secure in the poor, friends who will have everlasting habitations for us when we fail and are driven out of our present houses, because in this account Christ and the poor are one.

The truth that religion and beneficence are one and inseparable, was powerfully set forth in the Pentecostal scene. Willing to test the generosity of the new converts,

God had gathered thousands of converted strangers into Jerusalem, and detained them perhaps for months without their own means of support. Here then was a vast seminary of preachers for the world, continuing steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine—waiting to be endued with power from on high, to go out and spread the flame which had been kindled within them. For the feeding of this multitude, large draughts were made on those who had property in Jerusalem. These freely let Christ into their estates, so far as he had need. And without renouncing the right of property, or commencing any community system, each one, for that time and occasion, “possessed as though he possessed not.” So the first opening of Christianity, in the commencement of the dispensation of the Spirit, was signalized by an example of beneficence fit to instruct the world, and one that is destined to enlighten all nations into the true nature of religion.

Thenceforward, in spreading the gospel, the converts are everywhere seen freely risking or sacrificing property in proportion to the need of the spreading work, and taking joyfully the spoiling of their goods. Among no class of men has beneficence had such exemplifications as among the first Christians. And without hesitation, they said of those in whose religion it had no part, *How dwelleth the love of God in him!* Yea, they had such conceptions of the identity of beneficence and religion, that they could say, “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction.” So full is the evidence, that they commit a great and fatal mistake who expect to be Christians without habits of beneficence.

2. The next point of scriptural teaching about this duty is, that *acts of beneficence are required for our spiritual good*—for the exercise of our hearts to benevolence and our growth in grace. We are required to give, because “it is more blessed to give than to receive.” The redemption

of man involves his recovery from selfishness, the essence of sin, by training him to benevolent action. Hence, as soon as one is brought out of darkness into marvellous light, a world in darkness appeals to him for his aid; and all the wants of a world appealing to him are his means of grace. "The poor shall not cease out of the land;" but it is not because God could not have made them rich. Nor does he need our help in feeding them. He could have made all human supplies as plenty as water; and could have written his gospel upon the skies, and saved the expense of publishing it. He lets the wounds of dying men plead because they plead against our selfishness; and while we are healing the wounds of others, he secures a more effectual healing upon ourselves.

The general intent of the Spirit of inspiration in this respect may be well illustrated by one example, that of collections made for the suffering Christians in Jerusalem. About seventeen years after Paul's conversion, he visited Jerusalem, and was anew recognized as the apostle of the Gentiles, by Peter, James, and John, and then sent away with a special charge, that in his visits to the gentile churches he should remember the poor and make collections for them. In pursuance of this, we find Paul soon after in Ephesus, writing his first letter to the Corinthians, near the close of which he, as it would seem according to his custom, gave an order for collections for the Jerusalem Christians. He directed that each one should lay by every Sabbath such a portion as he could spare, that there should be no gathering when he came. In this connection he told them that he purposed, after a while, to make them a visit and spend a winter with them, before the donation should be completed by them. About a year after this, while in Macedonia, he wrote his second epistle to the Corinthians, and stimulated them to this work by telling how generously the Macedonians had done; and in this he alluded to the order given in the previous epistle, and the readiness with



which they had commenced action under it, and urged them to complete their good beginnings. He told them that he had sent messengers to them, to see how they had carried out his plan, and to see that their donation should be made up before he came, that it might be ready "as a matter of bounty and not of covetousness."

Now mark how, in all that is said of this subject in the space of two chapters, the sufferings of the persons to be relieved, powerful as was their call for charity, are hardly alluded to, and the effect of the gifts on the givers is magnified. The giving is urged, because it is one of the graces of the Spirit, a part of one's self-consecration to God, a proof of the sincerity of one's love, and above all, an enriching of the soul of the giver to all bountifulness, and a glorifying of God thereby. The sufferings of the saints are so lost in the exuberance of other themes, as to be barely alluded to but once in the two chapters, as in these words: "For the administration of this service *not only supplieth the wants of the saints*, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings to God." The purpose to which these gifts were to be applied was one which had moved the sympathies of the Christian world, and hence it is the more remarkable that so little prominence is given to it.

This shows that both in giving his order for Sabbath deposits and in this enforcement of it, the Holy Ghost had a higher end than the relief of that case of suffering, and made that suffering a means of training the heart to beneficence and a point of light to illumine the whole subject. Because his great object is to produce the best results on the mind and habits of the givers, he so carefully provides that the streams shall flow without a forcing-pump, without urgent appeals to sympathy, and with the utmost spontaneity. The gifts must be a matter of bounty, and not wrenched from the fist of covetousness.

That Paul makes the sufferings at Jerusalem a pin on which to hang a document for the benefit of the donors and

for the broad instruction of the world, appears in every glance of his thought and every stroke of his pen, as he moves onward to the grand purpose of the Christian's sanctification for the glory of God. Hear him: "Let every one of you, as he purposeth in his heart," give cheerfully, abundantly. Why? "For God is able to make all grace abound towards you." Yes, that abounding grace is the thing. Hear him further: "That *ye may abound unto every good work,*" that God may "increase the fruit of your righteousness." And then he tells of this bountifulness causing thanksgivings to God, that God would be glorified in that the recipients of the bounty would see and gratefully acknowledge in it the proof of the reality of their Christian profession; yea, that God would be glorified in the acts of liberality themselves being intrinsically excellent, and in the prayers and blessings which would be showered upon the givers, yea, in longings after that exceeding grace of God which the donations evinced. This completes the climax of his argument, and he ends all in "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift;" for such thoughts of thanksgiving, generated by human liberality, lead naturally to that of the thanksgivings that will ring through a ransomed world, and be echoed by angel-voices in view of the unspeakable gift, the gift of the Son of God, the source of all other gifts of God to man.

3. Because the cultivation of the givers' benevolence and his abounding to every good work is the great end of the duty, it is, in the passage above commented on, and in other scriptures, so carefully guarded, that *the gifts shall be spontaneous*—that the mind shall work under its own sense of duty and impulse of love. When Jacob dedicates himself to God in the gift of a tenth of his income, the suggestion is seen to come of his own mind. The gifts required by the Mosaic institutions, definite as they were, left abundant room for the giver's heart to play between different degrees of generosity. So in collecting the materials for

building the tabernacle, it was over and over again provided that every man should "*give willingly with his heart*;" and in the contributions of the immense treasures for the temple, it was said, that "the people rejoiced that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the Lord;" and David, with holy wonder, gave thanks that he and his people had been able to offer thus willingly.

This feature of the required beneficence has even more prominence in the New Testament. Christ says, "Freely ye have received, freely give." This freedom specially ruled in the Pentecost revival. "Neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own," though the apostles, the instruments of God's authority, acknowledged the full right to give or withhold: "While it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?" So Paul would have the gift made "as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness." "Every man as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give. For God loveth a cheerful giver."

4. Closely allied with this feature is another, that *each one's ability shall form the ground of his judgment of what he ought to give*. "Give alms of such things as ye have;" that is, according to your ability. He that ministers, "let him do it as of the ability that God giveth." God is able to make all grace abound towards you, that ye may abound to every good work." In building the tabernacle, the people gave "as God had prospered them" with the spoils of Egypt. God has named no fixed portion of income which it is the duty of each and all to give, for that would have made a tax and not a gift; nor can all, in the different circumstances of each, equally afford the same portion of income.

5. Another requirement of scripture is, that our gifts shall be *periodical*: that we shall have stated and frequent times of giving, both because our habits and hearts are

thereby better disciplined, and because we are really able to give more by frequent and small gifts, than by few and large ones. The offerings in the antediluvian church recurred at stated seasons, literally "in the end of days." Most of the offerings under the law were periodical; and as most other religious acts in the experience of pious men have stated seasons for their performance, so doubtless, under all dispensations, pious men have had more or less regular periods for their alms.

6. Still another feature is, that the alms shall have more or less *connection with other religious exercises*. Most of the offerings to God or for the poor, under the Old Testament, were formal acts of worship; and in the time of Christ, gifts were cast into the treasury at the temple, and tithes were collected at the synagogues on the Sabbath to be sent up to the temple. Every way, the first Christians, proceeding from the Jewish church, had been trained to connect alms with worship, and let their "prayers and alms" go up together as "a memorial before God."

Thus we have traced out the several branches of the duty as taught in the Scriptures: let us now lay them together.

1. It is taught that giving in charity is *essential to true religion*; that every one is as much bound to honor God by his gifts as he is to pray.

2. Our gifts are required as a means of *our spiritual good and growth in grace*, as the discipline to form us to a beneficent character.

3. Our gifts must be *free-will offerings*, and must be made according to a system that gives scope to the utmost freedom.

4. We must regulate them in our judgment according to *the ability which God gives us*.

5. They must be made at *stated periods*.

6. They must be made *in connection with our acts of worship*.

All these separate branches of the duty we find scattered through the scripture. Then, in the order given by Paul to the Corinthians, we find them all joined and compacted together in one condensed formula, as follows :

*“Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.”*

These few words embrace every branch of the duty stated above. The first is involved in that the order runs to *every one*. The second, in that the deposits are to be made, not merely to meet emergencies and particular calls for them, but in a way to work our spiritual discipline and growth in grace. The third and fourth, in that the amount to be given is referred to each one's own judgment of the ability which God has given. The fifth and sixth, in acting on this subject on the first day of the week.

Here then we have, from an inspired pen, the whole duty reduced to the simplest form and the shortest compass. Here is the *multum in parvo*—a compact compendium of all scripture on this subject, yet intelligible to the merest child, and sufficient for the man of the most extensive and complex business. It requires that each one on every Sabbath, or statedly at longer periods, set apart what he thinks he ought, in view of the prosperity which God gives him ; thus creating a fund devoted to God, out of which he shall meet the calls for charity when they come. This does not require the deposits to be made always in money. They may be made in such fruits of labor as the donor has ; or, when ready money is not at hand, by entering it on an account kept with our charity treasury. It was doubtless intended by this rule, that those who receive the fruits of their labor weekly, and all others who can conveniently do it, should make their deposits as often as every Sabbath. But if any one, from the nature of his business or incomes, require longer periods, he may still retain a connection of the duty with the Sabbath. In the

case of the Lord's supper, it was clearly the intent of the Holy Spirit, to intimate that the Sabbath was the day for the breaking of bread; and the first Christians evidently celebrated the Lord's supper every Sabbath; and if our present circumstances favored that practice, it might be well to do so now. Yet we do not consider ourselves bound to repeat the act every Sabbath, nor to confine it to the Sabbath. And if any one conceives that this rule allows a similar latitude of interpretation, he will answer a good conscience in obeying the requirement to connect his alms with the Sabbath, in a similar way. If one's circumstances will not allow of so frequent a repetition of the act which disciplines the mind to beneficence and calls forth the melody of the heart in devotion, he is free to answer the spirit of the rule in such a way as he can. The rule is essentially an embodiment of the whole duty of beneficence, and he who obeys it in its spirit, fulfils this branch of the great law of love.

With this condensation of all the duty in one simple rule, we have something to propose, which is as definite and simple as it is important; or rather, we bring God's proposal to our fellow-Christian, or fellow-sinner, in a very simple and intelligible form. We do not say, "You must be generous to the poor," or "You must give such and such a portion of your income;" but we say, "Begin now, and continue a course of action on the line which the scriptures have so clearly drawn." We propose not a particular gift, but the beginning of a well-defined course, that cannot fail to educate the heart and conscience to the love of giving, and therefore to generous gifts. In this simple rule and the habit of action formed under it, you have a trellis-work of divine construction, on which your beneficence is gradually to lift itself up, spread abroad its branches, and bring forth its clusters.

Let us then commend it to general adoption, by specifying SOME OF THE ADVANTAGES OF IT.

1. The first of these is, that *it brings our work of charity within the Sabbath*, causes our gifts to be weighed in the balances of the sanctuary, and our "prayers and alms" to go up together "as a memorial before God." It calls the mind to act on this subject when most susceptible; when disburdened of worldly cares; when most free from aspirations for worldly gains; when most engaged in contemplating the mercies of God, and the obligations resulting therefrom to make returns of love. It brings in substantial acts of love to God and man to modify our devotions. It quickens devotional thought and feeling with the impulse of self-denying acts. It awakes benevolence in a heart already warmed to prayer and praise by the word read and preached, and thus secures both body and soul to our devotions. So in effect the temple of our worship, like that of the Jews, has a Lord's treasury in it, to which we bring our grateful offerings while engaged in joyous celebration of the new creation in Christ; testifying our grateful joy in acts, as well as words and songs. Gifts are the most natural language of a grateful heart, and they mingle well with praise for redeeming love. Yea, they are as natural a medium of the soul's communion with God, as prayer. As devotion sharpens the mind for hearing the word, so giving attunes the soul to devotion, and devotion touches the rock of the heart, that the waters of its benevolence may gush forth.

2. There is a great advantage in *the frequent repetition* of the act, secured under this rule. If, as often as the Sabbath comes, the mind is called to exercise itself in a gift of property to God, or his poor, there must be more exercise of heart, a greater amount of thought and feeling about charity, than if we gave even in larger sums at longer intervals. If the great need and purpose of all our gifts is, that we may be "enriched to all bountifulness;" if, in laying this duty on us, divine goodness has planned for the discipline of our spiritual affections, then

the same reasons operate in the frequency of the exercise, as in the frequency of the exercise of prayer. The oftener we are called to act, the more we shall think and feel about it. And it is the thought and feeling that plough wider channels for the outflow of benevolence. It is the continual dropping that wears the stone. Hence, if any find it somewhat inconvenient to make the periods of their gifts short as the weeks, it deserves to be considered whether the advantage in self-discipline will not more than overbalance the inconvenience. Be that as it may, any reflecting mind will discern great wisdom in that which holds us to periodical acts, that tend to our discipline in heavenly charity.

3. The provision *that a private charity treasury shall be kept into which the gifts shall be made before they are called to be given out*, works important results upon the mind. It facilitates our doing the work "heartily as unto the Lord." It turns the direction of our gifts first to him. If we give for charity when there is no distinct solicitation nor object of charity before the mind, God himself is near us as the object of the gift. Our reference to him is likely to be more distinct, than if some case of human distress stood between us and him. We come to the work simply because God requires it, and we need it. The Christian goes into his closet to pray sometimes, because impelled to intercede for a friend that needs his prayers; but more often because he feels himself the need of prayer, and because he loves it. In both cases his spirit of prayer is promoted. But if he prayed only when impelled to intercede for another, there would be a fearful chasm in the discipline of his spirit of prayer. And if we give alms only when beset with the solicitations of distress, we are as far from an adequate discipline of our spirit of benevolence. What havoc would be made of the piety of the church by annihilating all system, all regulated habits in prayer. But who can say that we are not suffering pro-



portionally as much by our want of system in this other branch of spiritual religion? If our benevolence be left so much to casual impulses, it will undoubtedly remain at a low-water mark.

4. This provision *secures the advantages of beneficence to every one, if he will.* "Let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him." This assures us that God will look with equal favor on the small gifts of the poor and the large donations of the rich; and nothing in fact is more needed to move the masses of the church to action than this. Many are really able to do but little at a time—so little, that they are discouraged from attempting any thing. But these, when gained to the practice of dropping in their little every week, soon find that their littles have grown in months to a sum worth giving; and when made to feel that this little answers as rich a purpose towards the great end as the larger gifts of others, they find themselves engaged in a blessed work: a new world of duty is open before them. Poor as they may be, yet being asked to give only "as God hath prospered them," they feel no burden in it, and yet they divide with the rich the profits of a gainful commerce. He who has "chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom," will neither crush them with the burdens of his cause, nor exclude them from a share in its progress and triumphs. When weighing the widow's farthing-gift against princely donations, he struck the balance in its favor because it had more heart in it; because being attended with more sacrifices, it secured more sanctified affection, which is the true value of all gifts. Here, "the rich and the poor meet together" on a common level before God, in a work that carries blessings forth and back—blesses him that gives and him that takes. It makes your cent a week, if you can give no more, a means of an interchange of holy affections with Christ, a means of the enlargement of your heart and your sympathies for a dying

world. And perhaps that single cent, wet with your tears, followed by your prayers, sent to its place by the partial hand of Him who so valued a widow's farthing, hits its mark with greater force than whole talents of gold from other hands. A single penny tract has had now and then a history more to be coveted than some of the proudest productions of genius. And who can say that that tract, which has lighted here and there a fire that is destined to spread and burn, none can tell how far—yea, has generated a train of light that has already gone widening and brightening round the world—was not sent on its mission by the hard-earned and prayer-embalmed gift of some poverty stricken child of God?

4. This rule further commends itself by its *superior efficiency in raising funds*. This end, though a secondary branch of God's great work of benevolence upon this world, is as important as the conversion of the world. The first adoption of the rule in a given church may be followed by no marked increase; for its power lies in forming and bringing to bear the settled habits which must have time to form. As fast as it forms these habits, it extends the sources of an enduring power. This provision comes to the poor and those of smaller means—the great majority of the church—removes the discouragement which they felt from giving any thing because their gifts must be so small, and shows the way for them to do a work second in importance to none; and having enlisted them, it has secured recruits by thousands. Great complaints are heard, that a large portion of members of our churches wholly refrain from gifts for evangelizing. True, it is not the poor alone who are thus remiss. But if the number who are so could be reduced by the stated gifts of all who have been deterred from giving by a discouragement which this rule, well considered, would remove, it might be hoped the others would come into the work. Any plan of raising supplies that discourages the small gifts of the poor, cuts its own sinews.

Our worlds must be made by the aggregation of atoms. Christ has fixed a premium on the gifts of the poor in what he said of the widow's farthing. And the rule under consideration works admirably in this view; generating funds where there are none, gathering a thick and pregnant cloud and drenching showers from exhalations too thin to be visible.

With admirable flexibility the rule bends to all varieties of cases. It commits us not for the future to any amount, but asks us to give only according to a prosperity already experienced, the income of the last week. It names no fixed percentage which each one must give, but leaves him to judge, in view of all his circumstances, how much he ought to give. He may, if he will, resolve to give such and such a percentage, as Jacob did; but in this he is determined not by this divine rule itself, but by his own judgment of what is right in his own case.

5. Another material advantage of action under such a rule is, that *it secures to us a fund always at hand to meet the calls for charity as they come.* In deciding whether to give for a particular object, selfishness cannot come in and plead against it; for it has no interest in the question. The money in hand, to be given or not given, is already the Lord's, and not ours; and acting as his stewards, we only decide how much of the Lord's money we will give on the occasion presented. Here is a means of becoming cheerful givers—of escaping from the control or bias of selfishness, while educating the conscience and heart to expansive love. The nursing of such a fund for Christ, while it insensibly interests the mind more deeply in every Christian cause, prepares us to give a cheerful welcome to every messenger of that cause that comes in the person of a soliciting agent. For we have but a simple question to settle with him, that is, how much of the Lord's money now in hand we ought to apply to the object he presents: yea, when all come to have such

funds, soliciting agencies will disappear, and with them all the cumbrous and costly machinery now so needful for financial collections. The plan which Paul struck out, though it required agents to *commence* operations under it, left little for agents permanently to do. He did not say, Wait till I or some other agent come, and give you the thrilling details of the suffering saints; but, Let "there be no gatherings when I come."

6. Action under this rule secures the impulses and growth of our benevolence *to come from the most spiritual and evangelical motives*. Paul did not make the fact that somebody will suffer if we do not give, the main reason for our giving, and thus leave the main-spring untouched. He did not rely on the energy and eloquence of agents giving the statistics and a panorama of the world lying in wickedness, and from these appealing to natural sympathies; but he took hold of an order of motives that are capable of rousing the whole energy of the heart. None ever felt more deeply the wants and woes of a dying world, but he presents motives still higher and more controlling. Under a rule which secured habits of stated giving as God prospered, he secured the preponderance of evangelical motives, and the more moving facts of Christ's redemption. He told of obligations to Christ, of the love of Christ constraining. He grasped the prime elements of persuasion, and descended not to lower themes. He sought to enthrone in the mind a steady and omnipresent principle of action—a habit of giving from the intrinsic blessedness of giving—of doing it, like the work of repentance, because it is right—demanded by our eternal relations to God and the wants of our immortal part.

7. Every Christian ought to enter into the habit of systematic beneficence, under this divine rule, in order to qualify himself to do what he can *to remedy one of the greatest deficiencies in the present habits and action of the church*. There is a general conviction that the church

is not doing what she can and ought; and if we are not mistaken, the neglected source of the needed efficiency is in this heaven-appointed rule. If God has appointed action under this rule to be the great means of forming a benevolent character, is it a wonder that that benevolent character is so much unformed, where this rule is so much neglected? The remedy lies in a restoration of this rule of action. True, the thing wanted, in order to a higher style of beneficence, is a higher tone of piety, raised by richer effusions of the Holy Spirit. But the aid comes not without the means. God will not, by any action of the Spirit of life, set aside any law of life, or reward us for a rejection of it. Nor will he give the needed vigor to our beneficence, while we reject the mode of action which he has appointed for us. As well might the churches on the continent of Europe, where the Sabbath is to so great an extent lost, expect to recover the blessings of the Sabbath without a reënthronement of the divine law of the Sabbath and conforming their practice to it. Needful as are the larger effusions of the Spirit to a higher style of beneficence in the church, they will not come except through the channels which God has appointed. We have, indeed, had revivals, many and genuine, within the last twenty years; but no strongly marked elevation of the standard of giving by means of them, nor can we look for such a result till our revivals have a basis of better instruction touching this duty. Revivals, ever so powerful and far-spreading, cannot be expected fully to supply defects of character resulting from defects of instruction. While existing modes of thought and feeling prevail on this subject, we can hardly expect that future revivals will greatly raise the standard of beneficence; the piety of future converts will be cast in the existing moulds.

But if this rule is what we conceive it to be, a compend of the whole duty of beneficence—the divinely chosen instrument of forming benevolent character—it is to be the

grand instrument of effecting the needed revolution in the habits of the church. As soon as you have gained the consent of one individual to act under it, you have secured the revolution in that one instance. You have gained, not simply another hand to give now and then so much, but another heart to come under a training to steady and expansive beneficence. You have brought the remedy to the very root of one of the greatest diseases of the church. You take those just initiated into the first principles, and teach them the alphabet, and put them forward in a divinely-appointed course. The mass of Christians cannot be brought up to their duty but by *training*, by action under such a specific rule. For this end you have this rule given of God, intelligible to the merest child, suited to the use of all. And as fast as you multiply persons acting under it, you throng the way to that consummation, when every church lesser or larger, every family rich or poor, shall be a generous source of supply to our grand schemes of beneficence.

While the fields of the world are white for the harvest, and money raised can be turned to so rich account, and yet while so many in the church are giving nothing, and so many others are giving so little, we naturally seek to reach the public conscience through some untravelled approaches. And here they are. Go to any Christian, and convince him that God requires him to act under this inspired rule of the apostle, and you lay a grasp on his conscience which it has never before felt. All count themselves to some degree benevolent, and all general exhortations to benevolence are taken as running in the line of their own present practice. But ask one to do this thing in this way, and you make a new proposal. Convince him that God requires it of him, and engage him to commence and proceed under the auspices of his own enlightened conscience, and you have put him in the path that leads surely on to a whole-souled benevolence. Then let it be seen that this rule is

entering into the common-sense and practice of the church; let the common Christian life embrace it, and hold it forth as binding on all; let it be seen that the neglect of this rule sets aside a substantive law of divine life, as really as would the neglect of daily prayer, or the profanation of the Sabbath—then will you reach the public conscience with new power. Let all Christians, by word and deed, contribute to give this apostolic rule the force of a living command of God—let it live and breathe through the common Christian practice, and soon all who profess to be Christ's will be in the practice of it.

Here then is proposed for adoption a rule of duty involving our highest interest and usefulness, imposed by divine authority, and leading to the richest results. If any feel that they need no rule of beneficent action because they intend no such action, they must be left to the final reckoning, with the simple admonition that God's great scheme of beneficence never can embrace those whom it does not penetrate and make beneficent. But all who mean to act on the principle, that it is "the merciful" who "shall obtain mercy," will find intrinsic excellence and manifold advantages in action under this rule, will find from experience that they cannot well live without it.

NOTE. Illustrations of the practical application and benefits of this divine rule will be found on the cover of this Tract. The Society also publish three able essays on the subject: "The Divine Law of Beneficence;" "Zaccheus, or the Scriptural Plan of Benevolence;" and "The Mission of the Church;" issued separately, and also bound in one volume. As an encouragement to themselves and others in adopting this system, many have united in substantially the following

#### PLEDGE OR COVENANT.

Believing that the scripture system of benevolence requires every one stately to "lay by him in store as God hath prospered him," I engage, on every Sabbath or at other stated periods, to set apart such a portion of what God shall give me as my judgment and conscience shall dictate; to be sacredly applied to charitable objects according to my sense of their respective claims.

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Some, who have little money at command, who keep few accounts, and who live mainly on the yearly products of the ground they cultivate or other fruits of their industry, judge that they conform to the spirit of the divine rule by giving at *longer stated periods* of such things as they have. One stately consecrates a certain proportion of the products of his farm; another of mechanical labor; another of the needle, or other domestic industry—every one using his Christian liberty in giving stately as he sees best in his own circumstances, according “as God prospers him.”

Others, engaged in merchandise and extensive business transactions, accustomed to taking a stated inventory of what they possess, familiar with accounts and percentages of profit and loss, not knowing every Sabbath what has been the income of the week, have found great satisfaction and a blessing in *determining beforehand* what portion of all the proceeds of their business, they will monthly, or quarterly, or yearly devote to benevolence; and some have resolved on a percentage to be stately given, and diminished, or increased, in proportion as God shall prosper them

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“I decided to balance my accounts, as nearly as I could, every month; and reserving such portion of profits as might appear adequate to cover probable losses, to lay aside, by entry on a benevolent account, *one-tenth* of the remaining profits, great or small, as a fund for benevolent expenditure, supporting myself and family on the remaining nine-tenths. I further determined, that if at any time my net profits, that is, profits from which clerk-hire and store expenses had been deducted, should exceed \$500 in a month, I would give twelve and a half per cent.; if over \$700, fifteen per cent.; if over \$900, seventeen and a half per cent.; if over \$1,100, twenty per cent.; if over \$1,300, twenty-two and a half per cent.; thus increasing the proportion of the whole, as God should prosper; until, at \$1,500, I should give twenty-five per cent., or \$375 a month. As capital was of the utmost importance to my success in business, I decided not to increase the foregoing scale until I had acquired a certain capital, after which I would give one-quarter of all net profits, great or small; and on the acquisition of another certain amount of capital, I decided to give *half*, and on acquiring what I determined would be a full sufficiency of capital, then to give *the whole* of my net profits.

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“It is now several years since I adopted this plan, and under it I

have acquired a handsome capital, and have been prospered beyond my most sanguine expectations. Although constantly giving, I have never yet touched the bottom of my fund, and have repeatedly been surprised to find what large drafts it would bear. True, during some months I have encountered a salutary trial of faith, when this rule has led me to lay by the tenth while the remainder proved inadequate to my support; but the tide has soon turned; and with gratitude I have recognized a heavenly hand more than making good all past deficiencies.

"This system has been of great advantage to me, enabling me to feel that my life is directly employed for God. It has afforded me happiness in enabling me to portion out the Lord's money, and has enlisted my mind more in the progress of Christ's cause. Happy privilege, which the humblest may enjoy, of thus associating the common labors of life with the grateful service of the Saviour, and of making that which naturally leads the heart *from* God, subserve the highest spiritual good.

"This system has saved me from commercial dangers, by leading me to simplify business and avoid extensive credits. It has made me a better merchant; for the monthly pecuniary observations which I have been wont to take, though often quite laborious, have brought me to a better knowledge of the state of my affairs, and led me to be more cautious and prudent than I otherwise should have been. I believe this system tends to enlarge the Christian's views, increase his disinterestedness, and lead him to shun the tricks of trade. My own observation also confirms the belief, that even warm-hearted Christians *must determine beforehand* on the system they will adopt, if they would secure the benefits of the gospel plan to themselves, under the grace and providence of God, or its happy results to the cause of Christ."

God has appointed no means of extensive usefulness which does not involve the self-denying and persevering exertions of his people; and if this divine system is to be generally adopted, it is essential that pastors of churches and public men, to whom others look for example and counsel, should first themselves put it in practice, and then commend it to others, and help them to form wise plans to render it practically efficient. Especially should all do this who are engaged in any way in raising funds, or collecting for benevolent objects. Every one who is brought to understand the power and efficiency of this system, is bound to spread it among all within the reach of his influence. The circulation of this Tract and of the treatises named and the pledge inserted on page 24 above will be an effective means to this result.

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